

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1492

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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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1492

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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“The Church of the Living God”

Mention the word ‘church’ to most people and they would think at once of a building. The architecture might differ in their mind’s eye; some people would think of a spire, or a tower. There is even a church built in the shape of Noah’s ark – at least what the architect thought the ark looked like! But what does the Bible mean when it talks about a church? For, in first century times there were no purpose-built structures in which the early Christian met.

House Churches

The Jews had synagogues and the preaching of the apostles began there, where the religious community was to be found. The apostle Paul was himself a Jew and made it his deliberate policy to speak “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” (Romans 2:10). When he was excluded from the synagogue, because of opposition to the gospel of salvation, he would turn to non-Jews and start to instruct them. In Ephesus, we are told that:

“When some (Jews) were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he (Paul) departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years,” (Acts 19:9,10).

More often than not, however, it would seem that the believers met in homes, presumably in whichever home was large enough to accommodate everyone. In four of his letters the apostle Paul sent greetings to “the church that is in his house” (Colos-

sians 4:15; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philemon 1:2). That doesn’t mean that there was a church building constructed inside the house, or that there was a room which was especially set apart. It means something else altogether.

What’s in a Word?

It’s the word ‘church’ that holds the key to what it really means. The New Testament was written in Greek, so we are reading a translation of the original language. For us ‘church’ has come to mean a building; not so in Bible times. The believers could have set up rival ‘synagogues’, but they chose instead to use the term ‘church’, choosing the Greek word “*ekklesia*” which already had a particular meaning. Look up that meaning in a Greek dictionary (or lexicon) and this is what you will discover:

ἐκκλησία [ekklesia]

1 a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly. **1a** an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating. **1b** the assembly of the Israelites. **1c** any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously. **1d** in a Christian sense. **1d1** an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting. **1d2** a company of Christians or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs, according to regulations prescribed for the body for order’s sake.

(Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon)

So a ‘church’ as defined in the Bible is not a building at all. It is a company, community or assembly of people who believe the same things, worship the same God, and live together in fellowship or comradeship. It doesn’t matter where they meet – that’s not what makes a church. What matters is who they are; what they believe; and how they care for and love one another.



Christ, and being united theirs was a very high calling indeed. For, writing to Timothy, this was what the same apostle said about the congregation to which he belonged, something that was to be true of ecclesias in all ages:

“I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church (ekklesia) of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Christian Ecclesias

To emphasise that it is people who matter, not buildings, Christadelphians have usually called their congregations ‘ecclesias’, not ‘churches’. The cover photograph shows two such congregations who have joined together to worship – the Chabahil and Dhumbarhi ecclesias in Kathmandu. They are united by their understanding of God’s Word, and the hope that it brings of a better life now and a much better life in the world to come, when the Lord Jesus returns to establish God’s Kingdom on earth. It is that real and living hope that has united believers in all ages, for this is what the apostle Paul said about the believers in his day:

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Seven different things united that community into one body of believers, who had been baptised into the saving name of the Lord Jesus

Timothy was in Ephesus, the centre of idol worship, as a later article in this issue explains. But, said Paul, people who worshipped Artemis (“Diana of the Ephesians”) were worshipping a dead god: a creature made with hands; a lifeless thing. Those Christian believers who assembled together because they believed “the truth” as revealed in the gospel worshipped a living God. Writing to the ecclesia at Ephesus, he said that they were themselves a temple, in which God lived:

“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20-22).

So the next time you think about going to church, think about the people not about the building, and enjoy being together with people who share a real and living hope in the promises of God.



Editor

Lifestyle Choices (3)

Sound Body and Sound Mind

In this short series **David Pearce** has offered helpful advice about the things that will keep us fit and well. He explained that work can be good for us; then wrote about the importance of a balanced diet. Now he has some further hints to help us live a full and active life.

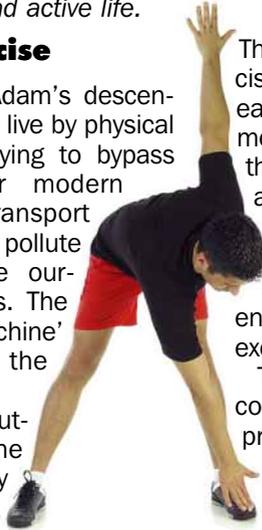
The Role of Exercise

As we noted earlier, Adam's descendants were designed to live by physical labour. Ironically, in trying to bypass the curse with our modern machinery and transport systems, we not only pollute the globe, but cause ourselves health problems. The body is a fantastic 'machine' that grows stronger the more it is used.

Sit in front of a computer all day, and the muscles will rapidly weaken, and the heart and arteries become furred up. Then we find ourselves with backache, or headache, or go down with a heart attack. A minimum amount of exercise is needed by all of us to keep healthy, even when we are old.

- ❖ Walking up stairs is a good form of exercise – it takes longer than the lift, but adds time to our lives.
- ❖ So is swimming, because it involves many different muscles, and cannot harm the back.
- ❖ Walking is good, if it is at a brisk rate, and so is cycling or weight training.

We do not have to pretend we are Olympic sportsmen.



This is a good rule – we should exercise fast enough and long enough each day to begin to perspire. That means the heart is working hard, and the blood is flowing swiftly through our arteries.

A Sound Mind

As we saw at the beginning, it is not enough to improve our diet and take exercise.

To be really well or whole, we need a contented mind. Now, it has been proved that when people have a strong faith, they live longer. If we believe in God and have faith in Him, most of the problems people vex themselves about will disappear.

- ✚ 'How am I going to find the rent money?'
- ✚ 'What will happen when Father dies?'
- ✚ 'Should I marry George?'

All these are matters that believers can leave in God's hands. We do not need to worry about the future. But you would need to start reading the Bible for yourself to verify the reality of this claim. As the Bible says:

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

Sometimes we cannot sleep because we feel guilty about something we have



done, or failed to do. If we have hurt somebody else by our actions, the first thing is to go along to them and say we are sorry. It takes courage to do this, and our apology may be rejected, but because our conscience is clear, we will sleep more easily afterwards. If we feel unhappy because of something hurtful people have done to us or said about us, it is best to forget the past and forgive them.



cheeks, your arms and fingers – contract them quite firmly, then relax them completely. At the same time breathe slowly and deeply – make your chest rise and fall.

Now (and this is the tricky bit), concentrate hard on the end of your nose. This sounds funny, but there is a reason. Our brain is constantly throwing up visual images into our consciousness – the

Looking back to the past is unproductive. We cannot alter what has been. Rivers will not flow backwards. It is better to concentrate on the future, for we can change that.

If we feel neglected or lonely, we can divert our bad feelings away by starting to serve other people – once we start to show love to others by smiling, fetching the shopping, or writing the letter we meant to long ago, our spirits will improve. Jesus had the perfect answer to feelings of depression – ‘Happiness’, he said, ‘lies more in giving than receiving’ (Acts 20:35).

Sleep Soundly

Sometimes we worry about not sleeping, which makes us feel even more tired. With practise, it is possible to train yourself to go to sleep. The secret is complete relaxation. If possible, take a milk drink just before bed. If you are a believer, say your prayers, and put all your affairs in the hands of God. Then as you prepare to sleep, make sure you are lying in the most comfortable position you know. Starting with the top of your head, and working steadily down the body, tighten up and then deliberately loosen each group of muscles in turn – your scalp, your

cinema of our mind. Our inclination is to pursue these images, and let our mind follow one train of thought, which leads to another, and so we find ourselves exhausted with the effort, especially if the images are negative ones that cause us pain or grief.

The secret is, by an effort of will, to steadfastly refuse to let the brain start on a train of thought. Imagine instead you are focusing your eyes on the end of your nose, and breathe deeply with all muscles relaxed. Quite soon you will find yourself beginning to yawn. Then, by holding your concentration without wavering, you will slip into sleep. It works. But don't give up if you fail the first time – it takes practise and discipline to really stop the brain wandering off on its own. Just show it you are master!

The Danger of Drugs

There are two kinds of drugs – those used by doctors to cure disease, and those we might call ‘recreational’ drugs, such as nicotine, alcohol and cannabis. Medicinal drugs should only be taken after seeing a qualified doctor. The suggested rules for healthy living should keep the body in good condition, but there will still be times

when things go seriously wrong, and then we need medical assistance.

The other kind of drug is more dangerous, because it harms health. Nicotine, the basic drug found in tobacco, causes contraction of the blood vessels, steadily increasing the risk of heart disease. At the same time the smoke damages the lungs, causing breathlessness and cancer.

Since nicotine is highly addictive, smokers soon suffer from withdrawal symptoms if they have to go without tobacco. For this reason it is better never to try out smoking – after a few cigarettes, you will be ‘hooked’ for life. And if you are a smoker, try hard to give it up. The early days will be terrible, but after this you will feel much fitter, will enjoy your food, and definitely live longer.

Cannabis is sometimes said to be harmless, but the smoke still damages the lungs, and causes cancers. Cannabis smokers tend to progress to ‘hard’ drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines, which are highly addictive and ruinous to health. Again, it is better never to start on the downhill slope.

Alcohol is the commonest ‘social’ drug, and probably the most dangerous. The danger is not so much the direct effect on the body, although heavy drinkers, once addicted, usually go down with disease of the liver, which is fatal. The main problem is that alcohol dulls the conscience, so that we do things under its influence which we would never normally allow ourselves to do. Most crimes are carried out under the influence of

alcohol. Alcohol encourages men to murder and steal, and causes car crashes. It loosens our morals, so that we fight and swear and commit adultery, and break the commandments of God. For this reason a believer must keep a tight grip on the amount he or she consumes, and the safest plan is not to drink at all. Paul says *“do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:18).



Drawing up a Plan

All of us want to feel well, and to wake up bouncing with energy and enthusiasm for another day. Having thought about the good advice the Bible gives, you may decide it is now time to do something about deficiencies in your present lifestyle. Then it is time to draw up an Action Plan. Remember, though, that improvements will take a while. You cannot reverse the bad effects of years of neglect or abuse in a few days. But you should begin to feel a difference after three or four weeks, and go on improving steadily after that.

✓ Taking exercise

Make sure that every day without fail you get out of the house and do 15 to 20 minutes of vigorous exercise – walking, cycling, swimming, jogging or gymnastics – enough to make you begin to perspire. Start slowly at first, especially if you have been indoors a lot, because it takes time for the muscles to respond to the demand for work. Exercise will get easier as your body becomes fitter and your heart stronger.

✓ Sleep

Try to fit in 7-8 hours of sleep every night as a minimum. If it suits your routine, have a sleep in the afternoon,

because sleep-scientists find the body naturally wants to rest at this time. Make sure you go to bed in a quiet mood – avoid watching exciting films just before bedtime, and if possible have a drink made with milk. Once you go to bed, say your prayers, and practise the relaxation techniques you have learnt.

✓ **Drugs**

If you smoke cigarettes, or drink more than one small glass of spirits or a large glass of wine a day, now is the time to stop. You will definitely live longer, feel fitter, and have more money.

✓ **Read the Bible**

Since the Bible is the book in which God our Creator speaks to us, we must

sit down every day and listen to Him. He knows how we can be truly healthy and happy. The Old Testament has a beautiful word for it – “*Shalom*” in Hebrew means to be completely whole, absolutely well. And that ‘*shalom*’ peace can be ours when we are at peace with God. So make way in your day for a chapter or two of the Bible. Job said:

“I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

This is the best advice of all for healthy living.

David M Pearce

Concluded

Life or Death?

We need transforming by God’s Word
So we can be renewed,
To overcome the law of Sin,
Our weakness be subdued.

The more we read and meditate
And seek God’s will to know,
The more God will reveal to us
The way He’d have us go.

God gives us strength to overcome
When to His Word we turn:
He has revealed His character,
So of His grace we learn.

The wise will know God offers *life*
So seek it, and you’ll find,
The world can only offer *death*:
So leave the world behind!



Gwen Marley

The Two Seeds

Some Bible words become very important indeed as God's purpose is revealed, none more so than the word "seed". It can, of course, be just a description of the way a plant reproduces, by producing seeds which are scattered into the ground. Or it can refer to human descendants, like "the seed of Abraham". As such it could refer to one descendant or to many, a detail explained in the New

Testament, where we learn that Jesus is the true seed of Abraham. But, as **Dudley Fifield** has already observed, these Bible-long themes begin in Genesis, for here the foundation principles of God's dealing with mankind are to be found.

Seeds in Opposition

① Genesis chapter 3 talks of two seeds that are in opposition to each other because of the events that occurred in the Garden of Eden. These are "the seed of the serpent" and "the seed of the woman". When Adam and Eve had sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, God said something to the serpent that was a prophecy of how things would work out much later in human affairs. God said:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

Notice the two seeds mentioned here: descendants or a descendant that will be in opposition to one another.

② Whilst the serpent was a creature in the Garden ("more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made" – Genesis 3:1), in later Scripture it becomes a symbol of sin. Those who take the thinking of the serpent into their hearts and minds, and thus allow themselves

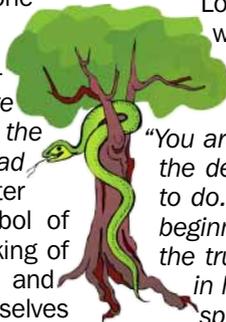
to be dominated by sin, become the serpent's seed or spiritual descendants. They think like him, so they can properly be classed together with him. Thus the Lord Jesus, faced by the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, condemned them with these words:

"Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:33).

Liar and Deceiver

③ Remember that the words of the serpent were a false accusation, a slander against God. He suggested to Eve that God had not really meant what He said, about eating from the Tree, adding: "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Catching the meaning of these words, the Lord Jesus when contending with the Jews said in answer to their claim that God was their Father:

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources,



for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

- 4 The serpent was the agency through which false thinking was sown in the heart of Eve and that lie which she espoused became the reason why death entered the world. In this sense the serpent was both a murderer and a liar. Those who embrace the serpent’s thinking make themselves the enemies of God (Romans 8:7) and can truly be described as the ‘seed of the serpent’, even today.

Promised Deliverer

- 5 What then of the ‘seed of the woman’? We have seen that from the very beginning God promised that He would raise up a deliverer who, through his death, would deliver mankind from the bondage of sin. Eve herself looked for the coming of this promised one and down through the ages, faithful men and women have waited in hope, longing for his appearing.



- 6 As if to emphasise that this Saviour could never be a product of the union between a man and a woman, the Scriptures place great emphasis upon the fact that at vital moments, when the purpose of God needed to be carried forward in the earth, God used barren women. Their natural relationship with their husbands had been fruitless. Then it was that God took action to remove that incapacity, so that in a sense the resultant birth could be regarded as miraculous and the child born

as ‘the seed of the woman’. Here are some examples of that taking place:

- ✪ Sarah (Genesis 18:9-11)
 - ✪ Rebekah (Genesis 25:21)
 - ✪ Samson’s mother (Judges 13:2,3)
 - ✪ Samuel’s mother, Hannah (1 Samuel, Chapter 1)
 - ✪ John the Baptist’s mother, Elisabeth (Luke 1:7-25).
- 7 The term ‘seed of the woman’ refers pre-eminently however to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the prophet Isaiah, some 600 years before his birth, who foretold the manner of his birth:

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

The prophet Jeremiah also prophesied of this event, although not in quite such a straightforward manner:

“For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth – a woman shall encompass a man” (Jeremiah 31:22).

Virgin-Born

- 8 Those prophecies were fulfilled in the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of a virgin. Man played no part in his birth, for he was the only begotten Son of God. The angel Gabriel was sent to a virgin of the house of David (Luke

1:26,27) and announced the marvellous tidings:

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:31,32).

As the apostle John expressed it in his gospel account, Jesus was born: *“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).*

⑨ So the words of Genesis 3:15 pointed forward to the ultimate triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ over the power of sin and death. The enmity between the two seeds was to culminate in the ‘seed of the woman’ being himself bruised, though not fatally (in *“his heel”*, Genesis 3:15). But in the process he would deal a death-blow to the serpent (the symbol of sin and its effects). The language is not difficult to understand. If we were to encounter a snake on our path, the natural thing to do would be to trample it underfoot, to stamp on his head and destroy it. Similarly the natural reaction of the serpent would be to strike back at the trampling foot and bruise the heel.

⑩ So the Lord Jesus, in the conflict with sin was stricken by it in his death, for the sting of death is sin (1 Corinthians 15:56), but by the manner of his death and by his victory over sin in his life, he completely destroyed sin in his own

experience and rose gloriously from the dead.



Now the opportunity exists for us, by associating ourselves with his sacrifice (by belief and baptism) to share his triumph. We can be delivered from the bondage of sin and death and be set free to serve God and in the life to come, when Jesus returns to rule on David’s throne in

Jerusalem. In the Kingdom of God he will utterly destroy sin in all its forms and make the world a wonderful place in which to live. It is no wonder that the apostle Paul expressed his appreciation and thankfulness so strongly when he said:

“When this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:54-58).

Dudley Fifield

Bible Line



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The LORD God the King

Running right through the Bible is the promise by the LORD God of a Kingdom which will be established on the earth at some point in the future.

Tracing the development of this idea is fascinating. For the Kingdom of God existed in the past, has a present aspect and will come to its full reality when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth, as promised.

National Identity

The LORD God chose one nation to be especially His. That nation was descended from the man Abraham and his wife Sarah, to whom God gave many different promises. Here is one of them:

“The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you” (Genesis 13:14-17).

The descendants of Abraham multiplied slowly until, driven by widespread famine conditions, seventy of them (and their servants) migrated to Egypt where they found sufficient food. In the land

of Goshen, a well-watered part of Egypt which was suited to raising cattle, they grew to be a very large company of people.

As the years passed, the Egyptians used them as slaves and employed them in building some of their great constructions. The Israelites, so named after the grandson of Abraham (Jacob who was also known as Israel), were required to make bricks in vast quantities. Later, to make their suffering worse, they were expected to make bricks without being given straw to do so. It was a situation which could not continue and, following the ten plagues which brought Egypt to its knees, God took His people out of Egypt and towards the Promised Land.

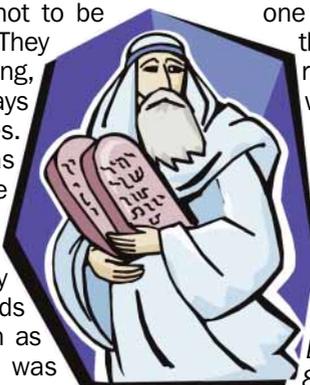
God’s Special People

As they moved from Egypt across the Red Sea, towards the Sinai Peninsula on their way to the land of Israel, God spoke to the people. He reminded them, through Moses, that theirs was a very special calling and that they should view their national life accordingly:

“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” (Exodus 19:4-6).



The people were not to be like other nations. They would not have a king, as other nations always had in those times. Initially Moses was the leader of the people, guiding them for forty years in the wilderness as they moved slowly towards the land then known as Canaan. Moses was always seen as the representative of the LORD God, frequently being called to the top of Mount Sinai to receive instructions. The most significant of these were the plans for the Tabernacle, which was to be a tented structure which would form the centre of the worship of the nation. And Moses also received the tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were engraved by the finger of God.



one occasion he was asked to become the king of the nation. But he refused, giving a very sound reason why no such king was needed:

“The men of Israel said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.’ But Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you’” (Judges 8:22-23).

Special Relationship

Gideon recognised the special relationship which the people of Israel had with the Lord God. It was not something he could interfere with, or would wish to do so.

However, a king who was not visible was not to the liking of the nation. Other nations had kings who provided a figurehead, leading them in battle, providing a focus for the people. Israel was different. The fact they did not need a figurehead in battle did not seem important, they would never lose a battle if God was fighting for them. Yet they continued to murmur about their lack of a visible king.

Things came to a climax when it looked as if the last of the Judges – Samuel – might be succeeded by his sons. Samuel was a great and godly man, but sadly his sons did not follow him in this. So eventually the Lord God acquiesced to the people’s requests, though it caused Him great sadness.

“All the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations.’ But the thing displeased Samuel when they

Reaching the Land

At the border of the land of Canaan Moses died, aged 120, and was succeeded by Joshua. Joshua was a great general who was able to organise a fighting force of the people of Israel to conquer the occupying nations, despite the difficult terrain and the fortified cities. The outcome of these battles was that the nations who were judged too sinful to remain there were removed from the land which God had long before promised to His people. With the land substantially conquered Joshua also died, at 110 years old, and the nation was ruled for a period of about four hundred years by a series of Judges or Saviours raised up by God for particular emergencies.

One of these Judges, Gideon, was also a successful army leader, and on

said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them'" (1 Samuel 8:4-7).

Rejection!

What the LORD God understood was that the urgent need felt by the people to have a king was not just a desire to be like every other nation. They were rejecting Him as their King. Samuel stressed this again a little later when their first king was selected, for he said:

"When you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore, here is the

king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the LORD has set a king over you" (1 Samuel 12:12-13).

But the situation was not without hope, for he added:

"If you fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your God" (12:14).

The king the people had chosen was named Saul. He was impressively tall – head and shoulders above everyone else – and looked every inch the part. Sadly, as things worked out, he did not measure up to the job. The people of Israel were about to learn an important lesson about kingship and government.

Mark Sheppard

The Growth of the Gospel Message - 31

The Riot in Ephesus

*The apostle Paul had spent three months in Ephesus during his third missionary journey and might have stayed longer, but a disturbance in the city made a quick exit essential, as **John Hellawell** now explains.*

Trade War

Around this time a great disturbance arose regarding "The Way". A silversmith named Demetrius was concerned that his previously lucrative business, making silver shrines of the Greek goddess Artemis (Latin: *Diana*), was in steep decline. Calling together his fellow-craftsmen and those of related trades, he reminded them how they had formerly made a good living from making and selling these shrines.

However, all that had now changed. The effect of Paul's preaching and, no doubt, the recent well-known miraculous events were having an adverse effect on those trades connected with the worship of Artemis. Demetrius declared:

"Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which

are made with hands” (Acts 19:26).

Even if we concede that there may have been a degree of exaggeration in what Demetrius said, it is a tribute to Paul’s commitment and energy that so many people over so wide an area had turned from their idolatry. Now Demetrius appealed to higher ideals (although there is little doubt that he was mostly concerned about financial losses):

“So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship” (Acts 19:27).

The Riot

Here was good patriotic rabble-rousing stuff and it had its effect. Those gathered started to chant loudly and furiously:

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

The effect was to attract others who probably did not understand the original cause of the shouting but, sharing the sentiment, joined in (see v.32). The instigators of the riot were now ready to involve those whom they regarded as the chief contributors to their loss of trade. Seizing Gaius and Aristarchus who had travelled with Paul from Macedonia, they dragged them into the theatre. It is probable that they were mainly intent on taking Paul but he eluded them.

On learning what was happening, Paul wanted to appear before the crowd but the disciples would not allow him to do so. Even some of the ‘offi-



This is thought to be a surviving depiction of the goddess Artemis of Ephesus

cial of Asia’, who had befriended Paul, sent him a message begging him not to go into the theatre. These Asiarchs, or chief officers were very much part of the establishment. They were appointed for a one year term of office but reappointment was possible and retiring Asiarchs were evidently permitted to retain the title, hence there could be a number of them in a city like Ephesus.

There was total confusion by now: everyone was shouting but there was no consistency, some were shouting one thing, some another. The majority were unaware of the reason for the riot. The Jews pushed a man named Alexander to the fore, having instructed him what to say. He was presumably an orator and one can only suspect that the Jews were intent on using the occasion to deprecate Paul and his heretical faith, as they saw it. The Jews hated Artemis and her idols but no doubt they hated Paul even more! Alexander attempted to get the attention of the chanting throng, motioning with his hand in a bid for silence, he attempted to speak to the crowd.

Two Hours

When the crowd perceived that Alexander was a Jew, like Paul, they shouted in unison for about two hours

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

This demonstrated the fanaticism of the worshippers for it must have been difficult to shout for such a long time and by the end many must have been completely hoarse. By this time the “City Clerk” had arrived and quietened

the crowd. No doubt he was aided in this by appearing in his official robes and by now the mob would probably be grateful for an excuse to rest their voices. The clerk was the executive officer of the Demos or governing body. As the most important native official of the provincial capital, he would be held accountable for the riotous assembly. So he addressed them in these words:



“Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly” (Acts 19:35-36).

His comments stated the obvious, as far as the crowd were concerned, and would make them seem foolish. He reminded them that the city of Ephesus held the title of “temple guardian”, literally “temple-sweeper”, which was an honour first applied to citizens and then to cities. There is a reference to Ephesus as “Warden of the Temple of Artemis”. The city had been singled out by the image of Artemis which, it was claimed, fell from heaven. This probably means that the original was a meteorite although later images were sculpted statues. The Ephesus Museum in Selcuk, close to the site of the temple, displays two such images.

The City Clerk continued by saying that all these facts were undeniable and were known to everyone. So there was no need for all this commotion. He pointed out that they had brought Gaius and Aristarchus to the theatre

and yet these men had neither robbed temples nor blasphemed their goddess. If the silversmiths felt that they had any grounds for complaint then there were proper legal procedures to be followed in the courts. He also said that if there were any other issues which they wished to raise then these too must be dealt with according to law. Most serious was the fact that they could be charged with causing a riot and there would be no defence, for there was no reason for it. Probably it was this issue which most concerned the City Clerk since irregular or unlawful assemblies would not be tolerated by Rome, and might result in the withdrawal of the city’s favourable status. With that solemn warning he dismissed the crowd and they complied.

The extent of this disturbance signalled clearly to the apostle and his associates that it was time for them to be moving on. There were other places where the gospel needed to be preached, where the reception was likely to be more welcoming. The challenge in every age, our own included, is whether we will resist the gospel or receive it gladly. That can be a life-changing decision.

John Hellowell

Free Will or Predestination?

*This is one of those issues that has long perplexed serious thinkers about religion. If God has given mankind the ability to make choices, how could it be possible for God to have predestined some to be part of His purpose and, by definition, for others to have been destined to take no part in it? That is the topic that **Hamilton Wilson** now considers.*

Wise or Foolish?

There is a preliminary issue to consider about human wisdom. Writing to believers in Corinth, in first century Greece, the apostle Paul was at pains to explain that the learned men and women all around them were not really as clever as they seemed. They were, he explained, wise according to the standards of the world; but there is a far better standard of wisdom than that. This is what he said:

“Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

Too Wise to Learn?

Paul says that the wisdom of the world, such that we might learn at University, doesn't help us to know God. Indeed God has brought salvation to mankind

in a way which many 'clever' people despise and therefore reject. It is, says the apostle, *“the foolishness of what is preached”* (NIV) that a man who was defenceless, perfect, and sinless should give his life to bring salvation to all who believe in him. And the fact that he rose from the dead is also something that worldly people cannot accept. (Consider the reaction of the Athenians when Paul spoke to them about the resurrection of Jesus – Acts 17:32.)

But there were men and women in Corinth who had gladly accepted the wisdom of God and made the gospel something that was central in their lives. This is what the apostle said to them and, in the process, he explains why God works in the way that He knows to be best:

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

No Excuses

It could be argued that it is unfair that

not everyone has had the chance to hear the gospel, but in another of his letters the apostle explains that God has made it obvious to everyone who wants to see that He made the world and mankind upon it. The created world is itself evidence of His existence and supremacy as Creator. As such it is designed to encourage people to seek out gospel truth in His revealed Word, the Bible. (In Psalm 19, the Psalmist notes the two methods of witness God has established to Himself. In verses 1-6, he draws attention to the fact that the majesty of the heavens and the celestial bodies testify to the existence of a Divine Creator, leading to verses 7-11, where the second testimony to God is found in His Word.)

Now follow the apostle Paul's logic:

"Since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things" (Romans 1:20-23).

The evidence of the natural world around us is evidence of a designing Creator, the all-powerful source of life. Yet instead of acknowledging that Source, and the allegiance which He requires, mankind has too often chosen to ignore the evidence and worshipped the created things, chiefly themselves, rather than the Creator. People choose spontaneous combus-

tion and Darwinism as their idols rather than choosing to worship the God in whose image we are created. So, God says, He has given them up to their own delusion, and the results that such perverse choices bring about (see Romans 1:24-32).

Easily Deceived

It's a sad aspect of much of modern life, especially in the developed world, that people are so easily deluded into the persuasion that we have happened to come into existence by the operation of pure chance – fluke after amazing fluke. It requires far more credulity to believe that, compared with a Bible-based belief in the existence of an all-wise and all-powerful Creator. In yet another of his letters, the apostle Paul predicted that this state of affairs would come about. For he says that a deceiving spirit would permeate mankind, whereby they would suffer a:

"strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11,12).

Then, directing his comments to the believers, he says this:

"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which he called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:13,14).

God has called them "by our gospel" and has chosen them because they have believed the truth as revealed there. Some people have scoffed at God's revelation, but these believers

have accepted it for what it is – a message of salvation from God.

Free to Choose?

So what about predestination and freewill? Is it true our fate is set and unchangeable? That we really don't have freewill? The concept of predestination is found in two main passages and here they are:

*"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. **For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he **predestined**, these he also called; whom he called, these he also justified; and whom he justified, these he also glorified"* (Romans 8:28-30).



*"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, **having predestined us** to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will"* (Ephesians 1:4-5).

If you read these passages carefully, you will see at once that we do have free will, but that God knows beforehand how we will exercise that freedom of choice. Here is an extract from both those passages, combined into one statement:

*"Whom he (God) **foreknew**, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son ... He chose us in him before the foundation of the world".*

Or, as the apostle Peter puts in, in one of his letters: true believers are *"elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father"* (1 Peter 1:2).

Really?

Our difficulty in understanding the concept is that we are mortal and finite, and therefore bound by time. God is not so bound, and can see us as we are and as we shall be. We still have choice and freewill, only God can see how we will turn out.

Except in a few cases I do not believe predestination applies to the individual, but to a class of people. It's like a train, whose destination is fixed and preordained; barring accidents, it will get to the terminal station. But we have the individual choice as to whether and when we get on and off the train, at any station, or even to terminate the journey altogether at any point.

So, what can we do about these things? What we can and must do is to respond to the gracious call of God when it comes to us. That call is to be found in the gospel. So we must read God's Word for ourselves and thus come to understand just what it is that God wants us to do. Use your free will, but be willing to surrender it in the service of Almighty God. Follow the example of the Master who lived by the watchword:

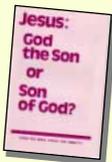
"Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Hamilton Wilson

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